

Konstan (D.) *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks. Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature*. Pp. xvi + 422. Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2006. Cased, £55, US\$85. ISBN 0-8020-9103-2.

Konstan has been lecturing and publishing regularly and increasingly on ancient Greek emotions for at least the last fifteen years. This book is a natural culmination in which, with considerable success and panache, he develops that work into a coherent whole. The book begins with an extensive introduction outlining the major modern controversies in emotion studies. One of the most important is whether emotions should be considered universal or culturally specific. K. argues that, while in general there is much overlap between individual emotion terms in ancient Greek and modern English, because emotions are based on a way of looking at the world, ultimately the parameters of an emotion must be unique to a culture. He makes an instructive comparison with colour words: the Greeks would have had the same visible spectrum as us, but they described those colours differently – for instance, we might variously translate *glaukos* as ‘blue-green,’ ‘pale blue,’ or ‘gray’. Similarly, Aristotle splits our anger into two Greek emotions (*orgê* for response to a slight, *to nemesan* for response to an injustice), but collapses our shame and guilt into a single concept. K.’s approach is fundamentally philological: he insists throughout that, instead of assuming ancient Greek emotions map easily onto their modern English equivalents, one must examine carefully the boundaries of the Greek terminology used.

A parallel controversy is the dispute between what K. terms ‘neo-Darwinists’ and ‘cognitivists’ on the nature of emotions. Following the work of Darwin in the late nineteenth century, ‘neo-Darwinists’ focus on the reflex responses (e.g. facial expression, flushing) that express an emotion. The ‘cognitivist’ approach dates from the 1970s, with scholars overturning the post-Cartesian opposition between reason and emotion, arguing instead that emotions are best understood as judgments based on cognitive evaluations. K. argues that these schools of thought are not irreconcilable, as an emotion is made up of both stimulus and response, while each school concentrates on only one. However he firmly aligns his own work with the ‘cognitivists’, though arguing with Aristotle that judgements are “strongly conditioned by the social environment” (p22), and that, at least in the archaic and classical periods, ancient Greek emotions are best understood as “responses ... to actions, or situations resulting from actions, that entail consequences for one’s own or others’ relative social standing.” (p40).

This emphasis on the socially reactive aspect of emotions pervades and informs the remaining eleven chapters, respectively on: anger; satisfaction; shame; envy and indignation; fear; gratitude; love; hatred; pity; jealousy; and grief. The book is mainly concerned with the emotions Aristotle gives socio-psychological analyses for in the *Rhetoric* (though for expository reasons they are discussed in a different order). The greater part of each chapter contains a detailed, and consistent, analysis of the phenomena Aristotle deals with, and the vocabulary used to describe them. K. is highly sensitive to nuances of different words used to express subtly different concepts. The chapters typically go on to compare K.’s interpretation of Aristotle’s emotions with their depiction in a wide range of Greek literature, especially in Homer, tragedy, oratory, and Hellenistic

philosophy. There is insufficient space in this review to discuss all eleven chapters, but a subset will be representative.

K. argues against the usual translation of 'kindness' for the emotion discussed in *Rhet.* 2.7, on the grounds that for Aristotle an emotion can only be a reaction to a cognitive stimulus, not a general disposition. He demonstrates persuasively that the emotion treated is not *kharis* (best translated 'favour' or 'benefaction', rather than 'kindness'), but *kharin ekhein*, or 'gratitude' for a favour rendered; *kharizesthai* and *akharistein* at the end of Aristotle's chapter are respectively translated 'doing favours' and 'acting ungratefully'.

K.'s proposition that 'satisfaction' is a more appropriate translation of *praotês* than the traditional 'calming down', is less persuasive. He argues that Aristotle's system leaves scope for "a pleasurable response to a gesture that enhances one's status or self-esteem" (p89), as an opposite to anger being a painful response to a slight; whether or not there is such scope, it is not clear that *praotês* is that emotion – 'satisfaction' works well for some parts of *Rhet.* 2.3, but 'calming down' better for others. In any event (as K. notes elsewhere), the opposite of a pain is not consistently a pleasure in Aristotle: pity is a response to someone's undeserved bad fortune, and indignation a response to their undeserved good fortune; these emotions are described as opposites, but both are painful. Aristotle's 'system' does not seem quite as neat as K. might like.

K. devotes one chapter to Aristotle's two emotions *to nemesan* ('indignation') and *phthonos* ('envy'). He argues that the interpretation of the archaic *nemesis* as an indignant response to a rupture of social norms, fell in the classical period within the (wider) purview of *phthonos*. As K. demonstrates, *nemesis* is barely used in the classical period outside Aristotle, who resurrected it to describe justified indignation. However the usual oratorical word for this is *orgê*; only occasionally is it called *phthonos*. This is a rare instance in which Aristotle shows himself significantly out of sympathy with contemporary literary usage.

K.'s case that the modern English and ancient Greek repertoires of emotions are not wholly in sync, is most effectively demonstrated by his chapter on jealousy, an emotion Aristotle does not treat. It becomes clear that this is because the emotion, as we understand it, did not even exist in ancient Greece. Greeks could express an emotion representing a desire for exclusivity within a sexual relationship, an emotion that could be termed *zêlotypia* from the fourth century BCE; but K. painstakingly demonstrates that the Greeks (whether Hera, Medea or Eratosthenes' murderer) did not feel pain at the alienation of someone's affection. K. speculates that such an emotion was not possible until women had equal status to men, and equal right to a chronic emotional attachment; accordingly an emotion similar to our jealousy does not appear in ancient literature until the odes of Horace. This is K.'s strongest, and most thought-provoking, challenge to our tendency to think of our own emotional repertoire as natural and universal.

This book is a pleasure to read. K. is never less than informed and incisive, and never afraid to be iconoclastic. He is clearly highly familiar with both the wide variety of ancient and medieval commentary on the emotions, and the modern, multi-disciplinary explosion of scholarship in the field, especially in the last thirty years, and this emerges most clearly in the copious endnotes (referring to scholarship in at least seven languages), and extensive bibliography. This reviewer missed a chapter on *zêlos* (a curious omission), and wondered whether chapters on jealousy and grief were included mainly

because the author had something valuable to say (it is unclear why these should be singled out from all the emotions Aristotle does not treat). But these are minor quibbles about a major intellectual achievement. This book is a 'must read' for any classicist (and indeed non-classicist) interested in the emotions, and no serious scholar in the field will want to be without a copy on their shelves.

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